



401 Cranbrook Street
Cranbrook, BC V1C 3R5

1-888-667-2311
stmaryangler@gmail.com

stmaryangler.com

St. Mary Angler Guide Service: a review of the 2016 fishing season.

Introduction

At the St. Mary Angler, we specialize in providing guided fly fishing trips on the rivers of southeastern British Columbia, Canada. Our region is located about 150 miles northeast of Spokane, Washington and is split into the 'East' and 'West' Kootenays. In the West Kootenays we fish on a stretch of the upper Columbia River for trophy sized rainbow trout. While over in the East Kootenays we fish a number of scenic free stone rivers for wild Westslope Cutthroat trout on the Elk, St. Mary, Bull and Skookumchuck rivers. Our fly shop is located in Cranbrook B.C. and is our base of operations. Below is our '2016 Annual Report' which provides an overview of the season to all the anglers interested in fly fishing the streams of S.E. British Columbia.

Overview of the Conditions.

Last winter brought us a snowpack across the mountains of S.E. British Columbia that was far below normal, again. As of May 1st the snowpack in the East Kootenay region, which includes the St. Mary, Elk, Bull and Skook rivers, was 46% of 'normal'. This was the lowest level in 30 years. Over in the West Kootenays, where we fish the upper Columbia River, it was only 67%, again the lowest in three decades. The low snow levels were initially somewhat concerning to us because of the implications for low flows and high water temperatures during the hot dry days of summer.

Temperatures across British Columbia were above average from January through the month of April. We experienced temperatures 3 to 5°C (5.4 to 9°F) above normal in our region. These higher than normal temperatures coincided with high sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of B.C. as a result of El Nino. These warmer water temperatures ultimately had an effect right across B.C.

With the low snowpack in our region we didn't see any flooding during the spring runoff. In fact the snow disappeared rather rapidly because of the generally warm and dry conditions in the southern portion of British Columbia. By June 15th almost all the snow was gone from the mountains, significantly earlier than usual.

In addition to the small freshet, we also experienced below average rainfall during the spring and summer of 2016. With the snow and high water gone early we were able to start fishing the St. Mary and Elk rivers early as we hit the water weeks ahead of schedule. The below average rainfall persisted right through the summer until October when we endured record rainfall for that month... strange.

High water temperatures were not a threat to the health of freshwater fisheries in our region. All our streams remained open and fishable. We are fortunate that the St.Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck rivers of the East Kootenay region are fed by high mountain streams and headwater lakes that keep the cool water flowing right through the summer months into fall.

In terms of air temperatures in the East Kootenays, they were much warmer throughout the winter to late spring, and just above normal from May to September. The warm spring and normally hot summer made for an early start and prolonged fishing season. That said, we seemed to have a lot of ‘mixed weather’ this season instead of long bouts of hot dry weather or rain. All our rivers had good flows throughout the season providing excellent fishing conditions.

Over on the upper Columbia River the temperatures were also quite a bit above normal through the winter into June. From July through August we saw the usual hot weather and in September and October temps were also normal. Rainfall was below usual from the spring right thru September. Fortunately, these conditions did not create any water temperature problems in the spring and fall when we fish for the big rainbows. In October we saw rainfall that was five times the long term average. However, high water did not create any problems as we fish below a dam so the flows were well regulated. The upper Columbia River is a very robust and resilient piece of water and we experienced excellent fishing conditions again this year.

The fishing season started ahead of schedule in early April with us guiding for the big rainbow trout on the upper Columbia River just above where it crosses into the United States. We started the summer fishing season for wild Westslope Cutthroat on the St.Mary River in early to mid June and late June over on the Elk, weeks ahead of usual. We got to the Skookumchuck and Bull Rivers by mid July. The season lasted into late September on the St.Mary and Elk rivers. We fished the upper Columbia River with our fly and spey rods into mid October.

East Kootenay Temperature and Rainfall (Station ‘Cranbrook A’, B.C.):

Month	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temperature in 2016	19°C (66.2°F)	23°C (73.4°F)	25°C (77°F)	26°C (78.8°F)	19 °C (66.2°F)	10°C (50°F)
Average Daily Max. Temperature (1981-2010)	18°C (64°F)	22°C (72°F)	25°C (77°F)	25.0°C (77°F)	19°C (66°F)	11°C (52°F)
Rainfall in 2016	71 mm (2.8 inch)	29 mm (1.14in.)	31 mm (1.22 in.)	27 mm (1.06 in.)	36 mm (1.41 in.)	114 mm (4.48 in.)
Average Monthly Rainfall (1981-2010)	42.6 mm (1.7 in.)	52.7 mm (2.1 in.)	38.2 mm (1.5 in.)	31.6 mm (1.24 in.)	27.3 mm (1.08)	18 mm (.7)

Columbia River Temperature and Rainfall (Station Castlegar, B.C.):

Month	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temperature in 2016 (Average Daily Max.)	21 °C (69.8 °F)	23 °C (73.4 °F)	25 °C (77 °F)	28 °C (82.4 °F)	30 °C (86 °F)	22 °C (71.2 °F)	12 °C (53.6 °F)
Average Daily Max. Temperature (1981-2010)	15.3 °C (60 °F)	20 °C (68 °F)	23.6 °C (74.5 °F)	28.1 °C (83 °F)	28.2 °C (83 °F)	22 °C (72 °F)	12.9 °C (55 °F)
Rainfall in 2016	30 mm (1.18 inches)	67 mm (2.64 in.)	71 mm (2.8 in.)	62 mm (2.44 in.)	11 mm (.43 in.)	34 mm (1.33 in.)	241 mm (9.5 in.)
Average Rainfall (1981-2010)	59.3 mm (2.33)	70.3 mm (2.77)	72.3 mm (2.84)	48.1 mm (1.89)	30.4 mm (1.2)	42.4 mm (1.67)	49.4 mm (1.94)

The Spring Season on the upper Columbia River in the West Kootenays.

We fish the 35 mile stretch of the upper Columbia River from the confluence with the Kootenay River near Castlegar, B.C. down to the Canada-U.S. Border. In 2016 this tailwater fishery provided fly fishers with lots of great fishing from the second week of April through June. We like to fish this piece of water in two ways. The first is from the platform of our custom jet boat using dry flies, nymphs or streamers depending on the conditions. The second is to cast double handed spey rods from the wide cobblestone shorelines and big gravel bars.

The rainbow fishing on the Columbia is always very productive in the spring. This year we had lots of beautiful weather early on which helped things along nicely. Our approach was to fish streamers with a sinking line, as well as use fly rods set up for nymphing. We also carried dry fly rods in the event that a hatch pops off during the float. We always have multiple rods at the ready in the boat so once out on the water we can try different methods. So our approach was to drift downstream, fishing along the bank edges and then to move into the big back eddies of revolving water and fish the seams and feed lines. Later in the spring we broke out the spey rods and worked the long cobblestone shorelines and the gravel bars.

Most of the fish landed this spring were in the 17 to 22 inch slot, with the average size growing as the spring progressed. We were also fortunate to land some nice rainbows over 23 inches. In April the water levels were low to start with at around 55,000 cubic feet per second (CFS), exposing lots of shoreline, rock and cobble piers and big in-river gravel bars. By mid May the flows were around 80,000 CFS and June saw flows over 100,000 CFS.

Through the increase in the water levels the Columbia remained clear providing excellent fishing conditions and the backdrop for some robust hatches of caddis, callibaetis and mayflies. The rainbows caught this spring were of all age classes and were bright, healthy and strong. When you throw your line into the Columbia you never really know what size rainbow will be fooled by your fly. But one thing for sure is that it will be strong and will run and pull hard!

Summer Cutthroat Fishing on the St.Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck Rivers in the East Kootenays.

By mid June the St.Mary River was rounding into shape about 3 to 4 weeks in advance of normal! It was still a bit high, but very clear and ready to float. The spring freshet came and went without a peep. On our first trip out on June 18th we dry fly fished all day while observing hatches of Green Drakes, Stones, Pale Morning Duns and Caddis flies. We also caught lots of wild Westslope Cutthroats in the 14-15 inch class all day long, as well as one 18 inch cutthroat-rainbow cross to liven things up. What a great day to start to the season.

The Elk River was also fishable well in advance of normal as we hit the water in late June. The Elk was ready to float 2-3 weeks early in terms of what we usually see with regards to water clarity and flow. On our first trip out we brought along lighter rods for the cutthroats and heavier rods in the event we saw some bull trout. The fishing was excellent right from the get go with good catch rates of 15+ per angler and most of the fish in the 14 to 16 inch class. The hatches included big Stone Flies, Green Drakes, Tan Caddis and PMD's. Another great start to 2016!

By mid July the St.Mary and Elk were into their summer groove with crystal clear water, summer flows, and lots of cutthroats being landed. We were now fishing all sections of the St.Mary and Elk. The Bull River was also ready to go. The Bull is a scenic little river with lots of nice pools and great structure where fish hold and feed; you can cast to both sides of the river from the raft. On our July 24th float the guys landed lots of cuts in the 14 to 15 inch range, as well as a few in the 16-17 inch slot, which are good sized fish for the Bull. The Bull River is seeing the benefit of the extra enforcement provided by the B.C. Conservation Officer Service and the increased average size of fish being landed is testament to the improved management.

In late July/early August we saw some much needed rain which recharged the groundwater and ensured the flows in the rivers would be stable through the season. The Elk and Bull Rivers ran into some short term water clarity issues, but the St.Mary remained crystal clear due to the flow buffering provided by its headwater lake. So the St.Mary continued to produce very well and as the rain stopped and the temperatures rose back to summer norms all the rivers came back on stream. On August 7th we were back floating the lower section of the Elk River looking for cuts and bulls in its good sized pools and runs. On this float we landed one cut over 18 inches to go along with lots of the 14 to 16 inchers. The hatches on the Elk River are pretty well always guaranteed and on this day we had Caddis, Mayflies and a few Green Drakes come off during the float.

In mid August we made the trek back into the canyon stretch of the Skookumchuck River. Under clear blue skies and hot summer temperatures we waded this pretty little stream hooking up loads of cutthroats in the 13-15 inch class. We also landed a couple of cutthroat trout pushing 17. Later in the day we hiked in further down the River in search of a nice deep hole where the bull trout lurk. We tied on one of our custom streamers from the shop, casted and stripped it through the hole quickly and ... bam!... caught a nice 10 pound bull trout! It was a very exciting fight and once landed we took a quick picture and released this beauty back into the emerald waters of the Skook.

The grasshopper population grew throughout out August to the point where they dominated. Catch rates on the St.Mary and Elk remained in the 15-25 per angler day range and the fishing conditions were optimal. By month's end the hot weather had peaked as we were starting to see cool morning temperatures.

By the first week of September we had snow on the Rocky Mountains. By mid September on the St.Mary we were seeing large hatches of big October Caddis, as well as some large format Blue Winged Olives, some Green Drakes and Mahogany Duns. On the Elk River we were seeing hatches of small Blue Winged Olives, Midges, Green/Brown Drakes and big October Caddis. All these hatches led to some great days on the water as the cutthroats were loading up on all this food. We finished off the month with a walk and wade trip into the canyon section of the Skookumchuck River against the backdrop of the fall colours.

All our East Kootenays rivers fished very well thru September as the water flows stood up well and the fish remained active. As usual there was very little angling pressure leaving the rivers pretty well exclusively to us and our clients.

Fall Fishing for Big Rainbows on the Upper Columbia River.

In late September we packed up our new custom built jet boat and headed over to the Columbia to chase the big rainbows. We had just taken delivery of our new aluminum hulled 17 footer with a 40 horsepower jet. It has a high prow like a drift boat, has a lot of covered storage, plenty of room for the anglers, is rowable and is very wide and stable. It is an outstanding fishing platform as the jet gets us around very quickly, the design allows it to be rowed and it is very safe. The rowing means the angler can be kept in the sweet spot allowing one to fish directly into feeding lanes, converging currents or directly at rising rainbows.

When we came over to the Columbia this fall, we did not know it was going to be such a wet month. But that did not stop us from hitting the water in search of trout. In the fall our approach is to start off by throwing streamers, but when there is a good dry fly hatch and the rainbows start to rise, we unleash the dry flies. So we always rig up multiple rods for both the streamer and the dry fly methods.

On our October 2nd trip the fishing was outstanding as the rainbows took the streamer without hesitation. The anglers were hooking up on pretty well every second cast! This first week of October was one where you could do nothing wrong; as long as you could get the cast out 30-40 feet from the boat, the fish spotted the streamer and hammered it. On this day the guys landed 20 fish each, while missing quite a few more. The biggest rainbow caught was a nice 27 inch rainbow trout that jumped multiple times and almost took the angler into his backing. It was very exciting for these guys... an awesome day of fishing.

On the subsequent October trips we continued to fish mostly streamers, casting dry flies during the October Caddis and Blue Winged Olive hatches. We also used our Spey rods for fishing on the wide exposed cobble shorelines. After all, water flows in October had dropped back down to around 40,000 CFS.

On our last trip of the season on October 17th, the anglers caught and released about 15 rainbows each with most of them falling into the 16 to 21 inch range. The one exception was a beautiful rainbow that stretched 26 inches. No matter the size of the rainbow you hook up on the Columbia, they are all incredible fighters and can take you into your backing many times before they are brought in. Sometimes when we hook a particularly feisty fish we will have to chase them with the boat and that can be a lot of fun for both the guide and the angler.

Annual Hosted Trip to Christmas Island

Last winter we hosted our annual fishing trip to the Republic of Kiribati, also known as Christmas Island. Christmas is located south of the Hawaiian Islands in the south Pacific Ocean. As the host, we made all the arrangements and set everyone up at the local lodge, ensuring all had the proper gear. On Christmas Island we fished for both bonefish and Giant Trivially (GT's), which are the main draw to this remote piece of paradise. The bone fish landed by our group ranged from 2 to 8 pounds, while the GT's were from 5 to 60 pounds. Most of the GT's landed were in the 10 to 20 pound slot, while the biggest GT was a whopping 60 pounder! We had 6 days of incredible fishing on this beautiful remote island!

The main rods used were 8 weights for bones and 12 weights for GT's. For those who needed it, we put together a gear package and custom tied flies. We are taking a group of 14 to Christmas Island again this February 21 to 28th.

So there you have it, another year of great fishing with the St. Mary Angler is complete. I am sure there are many enjoyable memories etched into the minds of all those anglers we accompanied out on the water this year.

As always, we greatly appreciated the patronage of our guide service and the fly shop in Cranbrook, B.C. We wish everyone a healthy and enjoyable Christmas and Holiday Season. We hope to see you in the shop, or out on the river again next year.

We will be attending tradeshow in Washington and Oregon in the New Year. While our 2017 trip to Christmas Island is full, we are booking people into 2018 now. If you have an interest in coming along with us to Christmas Island, or wish to book a trip to any of the rivers we float in B.C., feel free to give us a shout to discuss the details.

Feel free to contact us anytime via our email or at 1-800-667-2311. We are always eager to talk about the fishing and be sure to follow us at the Facebook link below.

Take care,

Kelly & Karen

Kelly and Karen Laatsch
St.Mary Angler Fly Shop
401 Cranbrook St. N
Cranbrook, B.C. CANADA
V1C 3R5
stmaryangler@gmail.com
<https://www.facebook.com/StMaryAnglerBC>

PS To find out which tradeshow we will be attending in early 2017, go to <http://www.stmaryangler.com/tradeshows.html> for dates, locations and to contact us for will call tickets if you will be attending. To learn more about the rivers we fish check out <http://www.stmaryangler.com/riverft.html>.

Report #21 (October 17, 2016)

One last trip on the Columbia River as we wrap things up for the season! The 2016 season is coming to an end and there is no better place for us to wrap things up than with a day on the Columbia River chasing big rainbows. On this last trip the group decided to fish the section from Genelle down to the City of Trail as this section produces very well during the fall.

The water level on the Columbia is quite low this week fluctuating between 38,000 to 44,000 cubic feet per second (CFS). These lower levels expose a lot of cobble shoreline habitat, which as you know, can make the fishing very good. The water is also clear to the eye, so we enjoyed very good conditions on our last time out.

At this time of year we basically throw streamers all day long. That said, we did use our dry fly rigs when the October Caddis showed up. We also decided to bring along the Spey rods for use on sections of the River with wide exposed shorelines that favor the use of this technique. One has a lot of different options when fishing the Columbia River in the fall.

We got on the water later in the morning and fished till dark. The fish tend to increase their activity as the air temperature warms things up so we start out later come fall. The fishing today was quite good. The anglers landed and released around 15 rainbows each. Most of the rainbow trout fell into the 16 to 21 inch range with one exception, a beauty rainbow that stretched 26 inches. No matter the size of the rainbow you hook up on the Columbia, they are all incredible fighters and can take you into your backing many times before they are brought in. Sometimes when we hook a particularly feisty fish we will have to chase them with the boat and that can be a lot of fun for both the guide and the angler.

In terms of the hatches we saw some small size 18 midges hatching earlier in the day before the October Caddis and Blue Winged Olives came off in the afternoon. Hatches usually occur here when the River and air temperatures warm up and that is when we put down the streamers and try dry fly fishing.

Today we used a variety of streamer patterns that all worked well, in addition to the October Caddis and BWO's when these hatches showed up.

We had another great day of fall fishing on the Columbia River. In addition to the reeling in some beautiful rainbows we had the pleasure to enjoy it all with the resident river otters, eagles and ospreys that live here year round, very nice.

As this was our last trip of the season it is now time to put down the gear for a while. We would like to give a special thank you to all those who fished with us this season, as well as those who dropped into the fly shop in Cranbrook. We greatly appreciate

your patronage. We will now take a few days off before preparing for the Holiday Season and attending tradeshow dates in the New Year.

Take care and enjoy the rest of the fall and the coming winter.

Hope to see you next year!

Kelly and Karen

St.Mary Angler

PS We will let you know via facebook when we have our tradeshow dates for 2017.

Report #20 (October 2, 2016)

The Columbia River is rocking this fall!

Well we are back on the Columbia River for another episode of 'fall fishing for big trout'. The weather has been quite nice, but there is change in the air as cooler temperatures and rain are one their way in the next few days. Today the weather was very nice as it has been beautiful this whole first week of October. The flow of the Columbia is dropping now and it has been very good for the fishing.

In the fall we mainly throw streamers, but there can be a good dry fly hatch as well at times. So on this day we rigged up rods for both the streamer and the dry fly methods. We decided to head down below the City of Trail to fish the eddies and along the bank edges down towards the U.S. border.

Fishing from a boat on the Columbia has many advantages. It allows one to cast into the big eddies and along the bank edges with ease. Maybe even better, fishing by boat means you do not have to walk along the cobble strewn shoreline, which can be very slippery. It is also quite difficult to wade with the strong current moving around your legs! So the boat is the preferred mode of fishing the Columbia.

The fishing has been outstanding this past week and it continued today. The rainbows were feeding aggressively and took a streamer without hesitation. The

guys were hooking up on pretty well every second cast! This was a week were you could do nothing wrong; as long as you could get the cast out 30-40 feet from the boat, the fish spotted the streamer and hammered it. Today the guys landed 20 fish each, while missing quite a few more. The biggest rainbow caught was a nice 27 inch rainbow trout that jumped multiple times and almost took the angler into his backing. It was very exciting for these guys... an awesome day of fishing.

October Caddis and some small midges were hatching, but the guys decided to stay on the streamer technique and continue to pick up fish. The flies that worked well included Kelly's Super Streamer and the Girdle Bug, a.k.a. the Pickle. We did use a few dry flies including October Caddis, Stimulators (Orange Stim Chew Toy) and Blue Winged Olives.

In terms of wildlife, we spotted some turkeys working their way along the banks of the Columbia, as well as some eagles perched on their nests.

The Columbia is an amazing fishery and can produce some outstanding days of rainbow trout fishing, like today.

This week of October 2-8th the rain has moved in, so we will see if the big boys want to come out and play. We are on the Columbia till the 16th.

Tight Lines!

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

Report #19 (Sept. 26, 2016)

A Beautiful Fall Day for a Walk and Wade on the Skookumchuck!

This last week of September has brought back the summer weather to the Kootenay region of southeastern B.C. Warmer temperatures and beautiful blue skies are always welcome. This fall has been very mild and the colors of the trees are now vivid and bright.

Today was a great day to head back into the mountains for a walk and wade deep into the canyon section of the Skookumchuck River. The guys met at our fly shop in Cranbrook at 8:00 a.m. With coffee in hand, everyone piled into the truck and headed out for the 1.5 hour drive into the back country. The morning was very cool to start, but as the day progressed it warmed up to a pleasant 18°C (65°F).

The conditions on the Skookumchuck River are normal for this time of year. It is low with many pockets of water. It is now easy to walk and wade and can be crossed in a number of sections.

We got to the River, strung the rods and headed down along the path towards the canyon. We walked for about 30 minutes before we reached the beginning of the canyon, stopping to cast into a nice pool. Thinking that the River had to warm up a bit, we were not expecting readily active fish on the dry fly in the morning. However, we were proven wrong as the first cutthroat rose and slammed the fly! The activity continued throughout the day. Each of us landed around 15 cutthroat trout, which was an unexpected count for dry fly fishing at this time of year. The cooler temperatures of the fall usually means nymphing or throwing streamers is a more successful approach. But the weather has been so nice that the fish came to the dry flies all day.

The average size of the cutthroats landed was 12-14 inches. We scoured the pools for bull trout, but because they have headed upstream to spawn there were no bulls in our stretch of the Skook.

The hatches on the day included a few October Caddis with some midges coming off as the day warmed up. The flies used were Orange Stimulators, Royal Wulffs, Fat Alberts and Lime Trudes which all worked quite well.

Because the days are getting shorter and the daylight runs out early, we started our hike back earlier than we would have liked. The animals start moving more at dusk as well, so we walked out in plenty of time to get back to the truck.

It was a beautiful fall day to be out in the backcountry to take in the absolutely gorgeous scenery of the Skookumchuck River canyon.

Now we are moving on over to fish the Mighty Columbia River where we will guide thru October. The Columbia River reports are to come.

So stay tuned!

Tight Lines,

Kelly
St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311, or check the Face Book page to keep in the loop on how the upper Columbia River is fishing for the big rainbow trout.

Report #18 (Sept. 17, 2016)

Fall on the Elk River is sublime.

The fall weather has been spectacular with many dry fly enthusiasts taking advantage of the nice days and heading out to fish. On this day we decided it was so nice out that we would make the drive over to the Elk River and try our luck on the stretch below Fernie. At this time of year it is absolutely beautiful with the trees decked out in all their fall colors and the mornings are cool, crisp and clear, just a wonderful setting.

We each rigged up our fly rods (a streamer rod and a dry fly rod) and climbed into the boat, pushed off and rowed down and across the Elk to fish the first run. As soon as we got to the other side we got out and walked the bank edges surveying the water for lurking cutthroat. The bubble line is where all the fish hang out, so instead of walking deep into the water, we began fishing close to shore and systematically worked our way into deeper water. This way we can cover more of a run and be very effective in searching for fish.

Most anglers like to throw long casts, but on the Elk and St. Mary rivers all you really need to do is cast 20-25 feet. The most important thing you must remember is to

control the line (make a quick mend and get a good drift) and present your fly softly on the water.

We hooked a few fish in this first run and then climbed back into the boat and headed further down river. Throughout the day we tossed our flies along the bank edges, behind large rocks and along logs. We hooked up many fish along the way. Most of the cutthroats were in the 15-16 inch range, very colourful, healthy and chunky. We saw a few bull trout heading out of the holes while we floated through them, but they were not interested in our offerings. We stopped at a particularly lovely run down river quite a ways, got out and began casting. It really produced well, a fish a cast for a while and some of them were a nice 17 to 18 inches. Overall we landed about 20 cutthroats each, it was such a productive day.

By late in the day the temperature reached a balmy 23 °C (73°F) with only the occasional cloud floating by. As we floated closer to our takeout we were lucky to see an eagle dive down into the Elk River to catch a fish. This was on a flat, shallow piece of water where the birds can easily spot fish. However, the fish won this round as the bird flew away with empty claws. But not for long I suspect.

Throughout the day we saw small Blue Winged Olives, Midges and Green/Brown Drakes hatching. Later on in the afternoon the big October Caddis were coming off as well. The successful flies used on the day included; Green Drakes, Mahogany Duns, Blue Winged Olives, Fat Alberts, Purple Haze and terrestrials - ants and beetles.

Fall really is a beautiful experience on the Elk and St.Mary rivers. We are heading over to fish the Columbia River at the end of the week. We expect it to be awesome!

Tight Lines,

Kelly and Karen
St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to keep in the loop on how the upper Columbia River is fishing for those big rainbow trout.

Report #17 (Sept. 1, 2016)

The St. Mary River is looking good for the fall!

The St. Mary River, the quite little sister of the Elk, has fished outstanding this year. As we turn the corner to the fall, it continues to produce a lot of quality fish!

Today we decided to float the lower section of the St. Mary down to the Kootenay River take-out near Fort Steele. All the rivers are now at their fall low flows. On the St. Mary, with all of its braids, this means the River can get quite low. Fortunately, we run Maravia rafts, which allow the boat to skim over river without drawing much water. On occasion your guide may have to get out of the boat to get it through a tight spot, but that is okay as the River is still fishing very well.

The mornings are consistently cool now, as fall has arrived. There is snow on the tops of the Rockies and the threat of wildfires is over. Today's temperature started off at a cool 2°C (36°F), warming up to 17 °C (63°F). The weather has been all over the map this past week. Storms roll through the area fairly quickly where you can get wet, or it may miss you completely. Some sections of the river get bouts of wind and other sections are protected and calm. On the bottom section of the St. Mary today the wind was light and the sun was in and out throughout the float.

It is beneficial to bring along a set of waders and boots on fall floats. In addition to keeping you dry and warm, it allows you to wade the low waters as much as you want. And you can always take them off if you get hot. It is nice option to have.

The Mary started off a little slow, until things warmed up and then the fishing took off. The anglers landed close to 20 fish each. In addition to cutthroats they also caught and released a number of cutbows and a couple full strain rainbows. The kokanee (land locked sockeye) have moved into the river system now in anticipation of spawning. This usually starts in the third week of August and lasts into September. Sometimes this can change the feeding habits of the cutthroats as they stay below the kokanee and feed on eggs as they spawn. But today the cuts were still feeding on the surface readily taking dries. The biggest fish caught was a nice

and chunky 16-inch cutthroat. These cuts pull pretty hard and it is fun to fight these fish. Sometimes you have to chase them down the river so you can land them!

Today we noticed some stoneflies hatching on the lower river, as well as a few midges. The flies used consisted of terrestrials like Blank Ants, Black Fat Alberts and Hoppers. We also casted Purple Haze, Parachute Adams, Clinkhammers and Stimulators.

During the float we saw a black bear run off into the bush plus a lot of osprey and an eagle activity. Overall it was a wonderful fall day on the water!

The fall fishing on the St.Mary and Elk is wonderful, come up and check us out.

Tight Lines,
Kelly
St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a fall fishing trip on the St.Mary, Elk or over on the upper Columbia River for rainbow trout.

Report #16 (August 27, 2016)

As we make the slow turn to fall, the Elk River is fishing great!

The fall feeling is in the air as we are experiencing cool, crisp mornings now. With fall around the corner, the Elk River is calling out as this is my favorite time of year to fish it!

The cooler weather and rain brings out the hatches on the rivers. So we were excited to climb into the truck and drive an hour east of our Cranbrook fly shop towards Fernie, B.C. The section of the Elk we decided to float was the stretch from Fernie down to the Morrissey bridge. The weather was quite nice today with temperatures starting out at a chilly 8°C (46°F), but reaching a lovely high of 24°C (75°F). The wind picked up a bit in the afternoon as it looked like some weather

might be moving in, but it held off and the day turned out to be quite nice right through.

The water level of the Elk River has dropped down to its normal summer low with many defined runs and pools formed throughout its length. The guys wanted to mainly fish dry flies for cutthroats today, but if they spotted some bulls along the way, they would cast into the holes with their streamer rigs.

So we carried along the 4-5 weight rods for the cutthroats and 7-8's for the bull trout. It makes sense to be prepared for whatever you may run into while out on the river.

So we floated down to the runs and got out to fish along the bank edges when we spotted a few hatches coming off. We could see Blue Winged Olives and a few Green Drakes popping off the surface. We fished, matching the hatch, and also tossed some ant patterns. The fish liked them all. So it just goes to show that the fish are still on terrestrials in a big way and feeding well.

The fly fisherman landed around 25 fish each and they did have a couple of shots on the bull trout. They noticed the bulls were moving in some areas, while some looked like they were starting to stage for spawning in others, so they did not even look at the fly. It is always worth a try to cast amongst the bulls to see if one will take a streamer.

The cutthroats on the Elk River are "cookie cutters". From one to another most are in the 15-16 inch range. In addition, they are very chunky and fight quite good.

One angler caught a gorgeous 18 inch cutthroat when casting along a log structure. This cut was sipping flies and the fisher put in a very good cast, mended, got a nice drift, lifted up the rod and hooked the fish perfectly in the top of the mouth. You got to like that. The fish took off and he was into the backing quickly. The fight occurred while we floated down River so by the time he was landed and released he had been relocated to a different pool!

The flies used throughout the day included; Black Ants, Mahogany Duns, Blue Winged Olives, Green/Grey Drakes, Caddis and foam patterns such as Chernobyl

Ants and Fat Alberts. It is always good to have a wide selection of artificials that you can choose from when you hit the river.

During the float we saw a black bear plus a lot of the bird life amongst the trees. The forest along the river is full of life and to see some of it is exciting.

While summer is slowly fading, fall fishing is my favorite time of year. With the color changes of the trees, cool mornings and light traffic, you will love it.

Come and check us out.

Tight Lines,
Kelly
St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss a fall fishing trip on the St.Mary, Elk or the upper Columbia River.

Report #15 (August 20, 2016)

The St.Mary River is having a great year!

The St. Mary River has been so good this year that we have spent most of our time fishing it - rarely leaving to fish other rivers! Today we met our enthusiastic group of anglers early at the fly shop, loaded all the gear into the trucks and head off to the put-in. Since we had four anglers who wanted to get some instruction on both fishing from shore, as well as learning to cast from the boat, we decided to float the Pumphouse to Wycliffe section.

The weather was absolutely beautiful today with the temperature reaching the low 30's °C (high 80's °F) with a bright blue summer sky. The morning however, started off quite cool, giving us that beautiful freshness that only mountain air can provide! It is good idea to dress in layers so one starts off warm when it is cool and as the temperature rises you can shed the clothing to remain comfortable. It is also a good idea to bring a rain jacket just in case a squall or a little rain storm rolls through at

some point in the day. That being said, the weather cooperated on this day and stayed wonderful.

We all got into the boats, floated down to the first nice piece of water and pulled over so the anglers could pile out and get a lesson on the basics of fly fishing. We started with how to cast and how to read the water. The clients first were instructed not to walk into the water too far so as not to spook the cutthroats. And the lessons went on from there.

Over the course of the day floating in the boat and stopping and fishing from shore the anglers learned the techniques of fly fishing. And as a result, they all landed some fish. The cutthroats are a very accommodating lot, some of the smaller fish even chased the bug when the anglers did not get a good drift as the fly was dragging across the water!

Our beginner clients each landed 6-8 cutthroat trout and had numerous chances to hook up more. The fish are still feeding aggressively and are looking very healthy. Even the smaller guys put up a good fight.

The hatches on the day included small midges, but the grasshoppers are now out in full force along the bank edges. So patterns of hoppers and foam bugs are now working quite well. The guys also fished some Stimulators and Royal Wulffs, but they really stuck with big foam bugs partially so they could get used to seeing the fly floating on the water. All they had to do was twitch it on occasion so the bug looked alive.

Overall the day was a great success for this group of anglers. Whether you are new to fly fishing or an expert, the St.Mary River is the place for you.

Tight Lines,

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss fishing conditions or to book a float.

Report #14 (August 14, 2016)

The hike into the Skookumchuck River is an awesome fishing experience!

This morning we headed up to the Skookumchuck River to fish for the bountiful cutthroats and bull trout. The Skook provides an intimate and picturesque walk and wade fly fishing experience. The drive from our fly shop in Cranbrook to the Skook takes us about an hour and a half.

It was a gorgeous day. We left early, around 7:00 a.m. to get a good start on the day. Once we arrived at our destination we got 'all geared up', put the packsacks over our shoulders, and started to hike into the canyon portion of the River.

The walk into the canyon is an absolutely beautiful thing as we pass along the River's pools that taunt us with their beauty. But we know they are too close to the road and get worked over pretty good so we push on. We keep walking, heading back into the wilderness to find the perfect run and pools that take more effort to get to and thus harbour some pretty nice cutthroats and bulls. The weather was clear and beautiful today with temperatures reaching a nice 28°C (82°F).

Once we arrived at our destination we waded into the emerald water and started casting the dry fly-lines. We immediately targeted the backside of rocks and along log structures. The cuts love coming to the surface for their food and are very opportunistic feeders. They will eat a dry fly if it looks real and is floating naturally down a run most of the time. We hooked up many cutthroats on the day in the 13-15 inch slot. We did catch a couple bigger cuts, up to 17 inches, which were chunky and brilliant in colour.

After a while we hiked in further down the River in search of a nice deep hole where the bull trout lurk. We tied on one of our custom streamers from the shop. The angler then casted and stripped it through the hole quickly.... and ... you guessed it, he caught a nice 10 pound bull trout! It was a very exciting fight and once landed we took a quick picture and released this beauty back into the emerald waters of the Skook.

In terms of hatches we saw a few caddis and midges coming off. The guys had good success fishing Orange Stimulators, Purple Haze, Split Wing Caddis, Clinkhammers and Red Belly Fat Alberts. We also threw the Clark's Rat and a Dalai-Lama fly for the Bull Trout.

Overall the day was a wonderful success and the guys were very happy with the fishing and overall experience.

We hiked back out of the canyon to the truck reaching it around dusk. It was a good long day, but we still had some food left over from lunch and devoured it on the ride back to Cranbrook. That buttermilk fried chicken and pasta salad was even better than when we had it for lunch!

Come on up and check us out. You will enjoy yourself.

Tight Lines,

Kelly
St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a float. If you have even a little sense of adventure and like to hike, the Skook really is the trip for you.

Report #13 (August 7, 2016)

The Elk River is fishing great!

We were off to the Elk River today as we headed over to Fernie to fish the lower section from the old ghost town of Morrissey down to the Elko take out.

The morning was cool, as has been the case recently, but as the day progressed the temperature reached the high 20's°C (mid 80's °F). So we piled into the drift boat with the expectation that we would stop to do some wet wading when we felt the urge.

The water level and clarity on the Elk are now back to normal for this time of year. With the cooler weather this summer the levels are holding nicely and the fish are very active. We expect these good conditions to continue through September into October making for excellent fishing.

The guys set up their dry fly rods, but also took along a bull trout rod for the possibility of getting into them. Most anglers we guide prefer to fish with 4-5 weight rods for the cuts and go with the heavier 6-8 weight rods for chasing the bulls. The float on the lower section of the Elk is very beautiful as it gets away from the roads and has some great sections where the fish hold in good sized pools and runs.

As soon as we were off the bank, the guys were casting towards the bank edges as we floated down the River... you know, lots of casting and mending! The closer one can get the fly into and behind the big rocks or along the logs, the better the chance of pulling a bit cutthroat. These cuts can be tough, but if your drift is good, allowing the fly to float free long enough for the fish to spot it, you have a great chance of hooking it up.

As the day moved along the anglers hooked into a good number of fish in the 14-16 inch class. One angler managed to keep on a nice 18 inch cutthroat that bolted up from the bottom and grabbed the fly... and put up really a good fight. After it was landed we took a nice picture and released it. It was a nice fish, very chunky and healthy looking. These anglers had a really good day on the Elk landing around 50 fish between the two of them.

Hatches on the Elk River are pretty well always guaranteed. Today we had Caddis, Mayflies and a few Green Drakes hatch during the float. The artificial flies fished included; Purple Haze, Green and Grey Drakes, Red Butt Caddis, Fat Alberts, Purple Chubby Chernobyls and Swisher Caddis.

We observed a lot of birds during this float of the Elk and also spotted a couple deer hanging along the bank edges, drinking.

In general, all the rivers are fishing very good now. And with no wildfires to worry about and good healthy water levels, we expect the rest of the season to continue to be very productive.

We will fish the Elk, St.Mary and the other rivers of the East Kootenays into early October. After that we head over to the West Kootenay to fish the upper Columbia.

Come on up and check us out.

Tight Lines,
Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a float, or drop into our fly shop in Cranbrook if you are in the area. Our friendly staff will be happy to help you out.

Report #12 (July 31, 2016)

The St.Mary River continues to deliver!

Today we decided to float the Canyon section of the St. Mary River from Wycliffe down to the Mission, as it remains clear and is fishing well. Unfortunately, all the intense short duration rain storms we have been experiencing recently in the East Kootenay region have led to some rivers getting blown out.

When the rains come so heavy that the water runs over the ground instead of being absorbed by the soil, it causes the stream banks to erode. This erosion releases lots of fine sediments into the water leaving us with only a couple of feet of visibility, which makes it very difficult to fish dry flies. This happened both to the Bull and Elk rivers this past week. Fortunately the St. Mary River escaped this fate due in part to its headwater lake and luck.

The weather has been 'wait 5 minutes' type of weather. The days start off clear and beautiful and then during the day a storm will roll through bringing some short bursts of intense rain with it. Today most of the time it was quite nice reaching a lovely 30°C, with just a few short storms. It really just depends on where you are on the river when the systems move through whether you get wet or not.

The St.Mary River is now flowing at its regular summer level. All the rain we have been getting has meant the rivers are holding levels nicely and the water temperature has been normal for this time of year.

Today we wanted to dry fly fish and were very excited to get out onto this beautiful leg of the St.Mary. The fish were very active again as the anglers landed 15 to 18 fish each. Mixed in with all the cutthroats were a few cutbows and one rainbow that jumped several times before it was landed. We also had a bull trout come up for a dry fly, which is unusual but does happen. This bull trout was around 19 inches in length, that would have been a nice “chicken”, as we like to call to them.

We also had a bull trout come up for a dry fly, which is unusual but does happen. This bull trout was around 19 inches in length, that would have been a nice “chicken”, as we like to call to them.

The hatches today were mostly Caddis and Mayflies as the Green Drakes and Stone Flies have slowed right down. The artificials that worked well included; Purple Chernobyls, Purple Haze, Split Wing Caddis, Swisher Caddis, Stimulators and Fat Alberts. Black Ants and Beetles also performed well.

We did float by a black bear on the river bank, which was quite exciting. We also saw eagles and ospreys flying around their nests. So there was lots to see on the River today in addition to the scenery.

Here comes August!

Well, July is just about over already... wow. We are now booking floats into September on the East Kootenay rivers and later into October for the Columbia River over on the West Kootenay. So we will just keep rolling along; getting experienced anglers into fish and teaching beginners how to do it! All our guides (Kelly, John, Brennan, Nate, Ken, Steve and Rick) are great teachers and will put you in position to catch many fish!

Hope to see you on the river this season!

Tight lines!

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a float for August, September or October!

Report #11 (July 24, 2016)

The Bull River is ready to go and producing plenty of cuts and bulls!

Today was our first float of the Bull River in 2016. Recently we have heard good things from many of the anglers who have been walking in and fishing below the dam where the Bull flows into the Kootenay River. The word is that the anglers have been doing quite well, landing some big bull trout and lots of nice cutthroats. So based on this intel, we decided to check it for ourselves!

Our goal today was to float the top section of the Bull River. Upon arrival we could see that the River was in great condition with typical water level for this time of year and running crystal clear. The Bull has a lot of nice pools and great structure where fish hold and feed; it is a beautiful little piece of fishing paradise.

The temperatures reached a nice 26°C (79°F) with no clouds and just a slight breeze... a wonderful summer day!

The anglers wanted to dry fly fish all day so they put together their 4-5 weight fly rods and tied on their dry fly of choice. As we climbed into the drift boat, the anglers started casting right away towards the bank edges, then behind rocks and solid structures as we drifted downstream. We soon noticed a small caddis hatching (always a very good sign), so the guys changed their flies to black or tan caddis and continued to cast with confidence.

We pulled the boat over on a nice stretch of the River to allow the guys to jump out and walk the bank edge; casting into the top of a run and drifting the fly through it. When we fish this way, one has to be mindful to keep mending the line continuously so the fly looks like it is floating naturally all the way through. If the fly drags at all, the cutthroats are smart enough to see 'that isn't right' and will ignore it. The fly also

has to be on the water long enough so the fish can spot it, track it and eat it. If it starts to drag, you only have one choice... to pick it up and cast again.

Casting from the boat is a great advantage on the Bull River as you can get casts onto both sides of the River, as well as drop casts into pools and behind rocks in the middle of the river! It greatly increases the water you can access on every outing. On this float the guys caught many trout in the 14 to 15 inch range, as well as a few in the 16-17 inch slot, which are good sized fish for the Bull.

The Bull River is really seeing the benefit of the extra enforcement provided by the Conservation Officer service. They have done a great job of reducing the illegal harvest and killing of the wild cutthroat trout on this River. In the last few years we are seeing the size of the cutthroats landed getting bigger and the fish are looking bright and healthy! It is a nice little success story that will benefit the River's ecology and those who fly-fish it.

The flies we used on the water included; H&L Variants, Sparkled, Tan and Black Caddis, Purple Haze, Split Wing Sparkle Adams, and of course the foam patterns such as Fat Alberts and Chernobyl Ants. Just a heads up that the grasshoppers have not quite started yet.

We are moving into a cooler "La Niña" period this summer, which has brought cooler temperatures to the Pacific Northwest. These temperatures have really helped to keep water temperatures down as well. Water levels are also holding steady. The result of these positive biological conditions is that the fish seem to be very happy and scrappy!

We observed a wide variety of bird life on the Bull River today, ranging from eagles to osprey flying up around their nests to numerous song birds. We did not see any signs of bears on the River today...they are likely feeding in the high country now. All the rivers of our Kootenay region have been fishing very well this year. We are seeing lots of hatches coming off due to the cooler temperatures and the fish are feeding aggressively.

If you have never been fishing in Southeastern British Columbia, come on up and check us out. The setting is beautiful and the dry fly fishing is remarkable!

Hope to see you on the river this summer!

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a summer float. Drop into our fly shop for a great selection of rod, reels, flies and accessories!

Report #10 (July 15, 2016)

St.Mary River Report: the top section is in summer form!

We are now into 'summer cruise mode' as we are half way through July. Basically the conditions are now summer like and we are entering the busy time of the year for us. As for the weather, after a sizzling spring things have been dialed right back as we are now experiencing July temperatures that are cooler than normal with showers at some point most days.

With the cool temps and the regular rain the rivers are definitely holding lots of water for this time of year. The back channels are still looking good with good flow moving amongst the new structures and logjams that have formed. Over the last few weeks the fish have been moving throughout the system, but now seem to have settled into their summer homes ... which are our favorite runs and holes to fish!

Today the anglers decided to float the upper most section of the St.Mary River; from the Lake down to the Mathew Creek pullout. The storm clouds looked threatening throughout the day, but we only experienced showers on and off. We would experience a shower, then it would stop and the fish would feed heavily. This weather pattern brought some huge Stone Fly and Green Drake hatches. Once the storm occurred, the barometric pressure would go back up and the fish were happy to feed as the hatches began! A nice pattern on the day for fly-fishing.

We fished dry lines most of the day from the boat, casting along the bank edges and behind structures of large rocks, boulders and logs. We also got out of the boat a few times and fished up the back channels in search of some big cutthroats.

We carried along a 7-weight rod just in case we decided to target the big bull trout lurking in the deep holes. The bull trout are moving into some of the deep holes on the upper reach for the summer and we wanted to be prepared to take a shot at them if the opportunity presented itself.

On this float the anglers hooked and released 20-25 cutthroats and 4 bulls to round out the day. They were very pleased with the catch and the wonderful experience of the St.Mary. The biggest cutthroat was a nice 17 incher; a chunky fish that pulled very hard and put up a really good fight. This fish looked very healthy, and as I have said before, they seem very happy and are feeding aggressively this year.

The water temperature of the St.Mary has remained cool this season so the fish are not stressed, which is a big change from last year's high temperatures. Every year is different and we just hope for no extremes!

The flies used on this St.Mary trip included Stone Flies, big attractor patterns like Chernobyl Ants, Fat Alberts, Purple Haze, Turk's Trantula, Lime Trudes, yellow and orange stimulators and Caddis patterns.

We saw a group of wild turkeys along the road to the Lake, as well as a lot of bird life along the River. This included ospreys to eagles and of course, the ubiquitous swallows swooping down eating the bugs just above the water surface as they hatch.

All the rivers are fishing very well now, so come on up and check us out.

Take care,

Kelly
St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss available days, or to book a summer float.

Report #9 (July 4, 2016)

Summer is here and the river fishing is unreal!

Today the destination was the lower stretch of the St. Mary River from the St. Eugene Mission down to the confluence with the Kootenay River near Fort Steele, B.C.

The water levels are holding nicely as we are seeing some precipitation this month. Compared to this time last year we are getting more rain. The rain has been really good news for the rivers as it provides for cooling flows as the season moves along and reduces the danger of wild fires in the region. As the spring was so unseasonably warm and dry, this recent rain has brought us back into the normal realm in terms of precipitation.

The weather today was overcast with a few clouds and occasional sunny periods. The air temperature reached a comfortable high of 21°C (70°F).

After the freshet this spring this bottom section of the St. Mary River has changed somewhat from last year. The River is now a little more braided and we are seeing a lot more back channels. The lower St. Mary is such a pretty float as one gets a great view of the Rockies as we roll down thru the channels. Every once in a while I have to remind folks that we are here to fish and to not get mesmerized by the spectacular backdrop! After all we are floating and I can't power them back upstream if they miss a nice piece of water.

The anglers wanted to dry fly fish all day so they rigged up their 4 and 5 weight rods and put on their dry fly of choice. We jumped into the Maravia raft and floated down into the runs. Our approach focused on casting along the bank edges, along structures such as logs, or behind big boulders, all in search of the hungry cutthroat.

The St. Mary is still a little 'pushy' in spots, so the anglers had to make a good cast and mend it quickly so the fly looks like it is floating naturally in the run. The fly has to float along the surface long enough without drag for the trout to find it and eat it! Many times the fly will get sucked under the water and then the fish will not even look at it. When this happens, you must immediately pick it up and cast it again.

There is a lot of casting in a full days float, so you will be well practiced by the end! On this early July day the fishing was very good at the start, slowed a bit towards lunch and then really picked up into the afternoon. The two anglers landed 30 cutthroats between them, as well as a number of cut-bows, which made for a very interesting and exciting day of fishing.

The biggest fish landed at the raft was a cut-bow measuring around 18 inches. This fish jumped quite a few times until it was brought under control and photographed for posterity, then released.

The fish this year are looking very healthy in terms of color and girth. It seems that the fish are getting a little bigger every year in the Mary.

As it was overcast today, the Green Drakes started hatching mid morning and continued pretty much all day long. We fished foam patterns to start with including; Stone patterns, Fat Alberts and Chernobyl Ants. But as soon as the Green Drakes started to come off in force their match was the fly of choice. At various times throughout the day we also offered Royal Wulffs, H and L Variants, Purple Haze and Lime Trudes to keep things fresh.

As for wildlife, we spotted a deer coming down to the River for a drink, occupied osprey and eagle nests and even some wild turkeys at the take out.

The fishing is already in summer form on the St.Mary and Elk. So come on up and check out the rivers in the East Kootenays as summer is here.

Fish on!

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss available days, or to book a summer float. If you are in the area, pop into our fly shop on the main drag in Cranbrook to check things out.

Report #8 (June 26, 2016)

The Elk River is open and fishing well!

Today our destination was the bottom section of the Elk River down to the small community of Elko. On the drive to Fernie we did our informal "wind check". We stopped just before the southern entrance to the Highway 3 tunnel between Elko and Fernie and gauged how much wind there was. Our rule of thumb is that if it is blowing hard before we enter the tunnel, we will not fish down on the lower section that day. Fortunately for us, it was relatively calm, so off we went. We ended up with some wind after lunch, but it was not too bad at all.

The weather was quite nice with the temperature reaching 27°C (81°F) later in the afternoon. The feeling that summer is here, was felt by all of us.

The Elk River is at least 2-3 weeks ahead of normal in terms of water clarity and flow. We are seeing some of the best early season fishing conditions in quite awhile. All the anglers are excited to be out catching cutthroats on dries and bulls on streamers in late June!

As I was setting up the boat and getting it ready to go downstream, the anglers were stringing their rods in anticipation of doing some dry fly fishing for these wild fish. We brought along an assortment of lighter rods for cutthroat dry fly fishing (3, 4 and 5 weights) and a little heavier rods for the bull trout (6 and 7 weights).

As soon as we got to the first hole on the Elk we put some nice casts into the run; mending the line to get a good drift on a traditional pattern in anticipation of a big mouth coming up to eat the bug! You could see them cruise up from the bottom to take the fly on the surface right of way... very cool!

The day started with a bang and continued throughout. Fishing was very consistent and the guys had a great time. Each angler landed around 15-20 cutthroats. Lots of fish in the 14-16 inch range were landed and released. They all exhibited that bright red cut along the jaw line and were very chunky. The fish fought hard and were exciting to pull in.

The biggest fish landed was a robust 18 inch cutthroat, which got close to the net and then popped off. The angler got the good fight, but was not rewarded with the picture. Oh well, that is what brings them back the next time!

The hatches coming off throughout the day included big Stone Flies, Green Drakes, Tan Caddis and PMD's. Artificial flies such as Green Drakes, Orange and Yellow Stimulators or Stim Chew-Toys, Purple Haze, Split Wing Caddis, Chernobyl Ants and Stone Patterns were all working at various times. It pays to have a good selection of flies in your box to try in case it gets tough and you need to try other patterns to get some action.

On the Elk we always see a lot of bird life along the stream banks and up in their nests.

The rivers are already fishing well and bookings are coming in, so give us a shout about coming up yourself. If you are in the area, just stop in the shop and we can give you good advice on where to go and what to use day by day.

Remember to check your fishing regulations before heading out. There have been a few changes and you need to be aware of them before you hit the water.

Tight Lines!

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to stay in the loop on fishing conditions, discuss available days, or to book a summer float.

Report #7 (June 19, 2016)

St.Mary River is open and ready to fish now!

Our inaugural test float on the St. Mary River happened today and the season started off with a bang!

We hit the water as a group of 6 boats, heading out early in the morning after launching at the Kimberley Golf Course put-in. Our game plan was to float three sections of the River, all the way down to where the St. Mary empties into the Kootenay River. We knew we would have to move quickly, but we wanted to see as much of the River as possible to see how it may have changed from last year. As we gathered to launch our boats I could feel the anticipation and excitement of all the anglers. We worked quickly to string our rods, get the boats in the water, and push off for our first St. Mary float of the season.

The St. Mary looks amazing for this time of year. The hot weather earlier this spring and corresponding early freshet means we are now seeing conditions similar to those of the first week of July. The River is still a bit high, but very clear and fantastic for our float. The St. Mary is ready to float now.

The temperature on the River started out this morning at 9°C (48°F) and reached a high of 18°C (65°F) in the afternoon. The weather was pleasant but mixed with some sun and cloud throughout the day.

We dry fly fished all day for the abundant population of wild Westslope cutthroats. As we drifted downstream, casting along the bank edges, behind big boulders and through the deeper holes, the cutthroats slammed our bugs if the drift was good. The trout looked very healthy, but not only are they chunky, they have a lot of spunk in them as well.

As our group worked our way downstream we observed Green Drakes, Stones, Pale Morning Duns and Caddis flies hatching all day. While the cutthroats are now moving upstream to their summer feeding spots they fed heartily. On the drift we came across pockets of fish in some sections of the River, and then noticed other sections where the fish had yet to move into. In terms of how many fish were caught, anglers in all of the boats caught and released many fish with an average size in the 14-15 inch range...nice.

The biggest fish caught on the day was a hefty 18-inch 'cut-bow' that slammed a stonefly on the surface. This fish jumped so high out of the water it made everyone take notice.

The artificial flies used on the day included Golden Stone patterns, Green Drakes, Purple Haze, Stimulators Caddis and PMDs.

We floated three of the four sections of the St.Mary River, so we had to move quickly through a lot of really good water. We saw eagles and ospreys fishing in their favorite holes and we saw ducks cruising along the bank edges with their young. What was really awesome is that all our guides were able to see the River, float it and enjoy a day fishing with their family and friends!

If you want to dry fly fish all day and catch some nice cutthroats come soon as the River is in good shape early!

Remember to check your regulations as new rules have come into effect this season.

Hope to see you on the river this summer!

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to keep abreast of fishing conditions, discuss available days, or to book a float.

Report #6 (June 4, 2016)

Columbia River Report: the weather has heated up and the good fishing continues. The Columbia River has been fishing very well over the past month and the last few days have been no exception. We started today by having a nice breakfast at our meeting place at the Prestige Hotel in Rossland. We then loaded up the gear and headed down the mountain into the valley to meet the Columbia. We launched the boat near Castlegar and headed upstream to some of our favorite eddies.

The weather this weekend was smoking hot as temperatures reached a high of 36°C (97°F), yet the fishing was outstanding. The water levels recently increased from

95,000 to 110,000 cubic feet per second, so yes, it is a big river to fish. Our jet boat gets us around the river quite nicely at these flows.

As we approach the big eddies this time of year we always scope them out for excess debris and logs swirling around. While debris accumulation is normal as the flows build early in the season, we avoid eddies where we feel the debris is such that it will interfere with our fishing.

Today the anglers fished with their nymphing rods the whole day. Each eddy or run we fished produced about 3-4 rainbow trout. The average sized fish caught was in the 18-22 inch slot. The rainbows had very nice color and fought very hard as they are in prime shape!

The nicest fish was a 22 inch rainbow that was landed and photographed. It took the angler some time to land it as once the fish got into the heavy current it ran a few times and jumped repeatedly. On the day each angler landed about 15 fish, a nice haul indeed!

The dominant hatch on this hot day was a small size 18 midge. Later in the afternoon there was hatch of size 18 ants, as well as some size 16 mahogany duns. The fishing definitely picked up after the midges started to hatch. As usual, once the hatches started to come off in decent numbers the swallows were out in force dipping and diving over the water as they fed heavily.

The flies that were most effective today were Copper Johns, Jig Pheasant Tail (size 14-16) and Kelly's Micro Midge (size 16 -18).

Lakes and Streams Update:

The lakes in our area continue to fish well and all the small streams in Region 4 open June 15th so we are in full go mode soon! We expect the rivers to fish very well early on given the early freshet this year. If you want to come up and check us out, I encourage you to come early as you will not be disappointed.

Remember, the stonefly hatches on the rivers are awesome early in the season!

We hope to see on the water soon,

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 if you want to chat about fishing in our area. Check us out on facebook for frequent updates.

Report #5 (May 23, 2016)

Columbia River Report: the weather has cooled down and the rainbows have changed their feeding pattern.

Our Victoria Day long weekend was a wet one for us, but great for the backcountry and the rivers and the lakes that drain it. Snow fell high on the mountains around the Kootenay region and everything has suitably cooled down. As for the upper Columbia River, where upstream dams control the water levels and flows, there was no bump in run-off to worry about. The Columbia is currently running at about 100,000 cubic feet per second up about 10,000 from a week ago. That said, the rain did cool the water temperature of the River down and subsequently changed the eating habits of the rainbow trout.

On the Tuesday after the weekend of rain, the anglers put on their waders, boots, layered clothing and headed out onto the River. The temperature warmed up throughout the day peaking at around 16°C (61°F) with only a few light showers later in the day. We launched up at the top end of the system near Castlegar and powered downriver to fish along the bank edge runs and the big back eddies that dominate this River.

The guys started the day by nymphing, but we quickly realized the fish were not cooperating. So we decided to throw streamers and the activity perked up a bit. After some trial and error we seemed to find the right bug and we landed a few rainbows. After our lunch break we could see that the caddis had begun to hatch. We eyed a pod of rainbows rising to the surface to feed in a big eddy. So we exchanged our

streamer outfits for our dry fly fishing rigs and the game of enticing them to take the fly on the surface was on!

One of the anglers landed a nice 22-inch rainbow on the dry fly. It was a very exciting to watch the hookup then see the big rainbow take to the strong current and run. Over the course of the day the two anglers landed 18 trout. These rainbows were all in beautiful shape and pulled hard regardless of their size. The rainbows on the Columbia like to jump out of the water once hooked which makes the retrieve pretty exciting as long as they stay on the line.

With the cooler temperature of the day, the hatch was later in the day and included Black Caddis and small midges. One always knows when the big hatches are coming on the Columbia as the swallows appear across the water swooping and diving for every insect they can grab.

In terms of the flies used on the day we started off with Prince nymphs and Caddis nymphs, Lightning Bugs and Copper Johns (sizes 14-16). We then switched over to Kelly's Super Streamer and Girdle Bugs (sizes 10-14). We finished off with Tan and Black Caddis flies (sizes 14-16).

Regional Round-up:

The month of May has gone by quickly. The lakes have been fishing quite well so far this season. While there is always the odd tough day, overall all the fishing in the Kootenay region has been really productive this spring.

All the Rivers of Region 4 will open up soon, June 15th to be precise. Many anglers are starting to count down the days and we expect to have a superb dry fly fishing season in 2016. If you get a chance, come on up and check us out.

We hope to see you on the water this summer,

Take care,

Kelly
St.Mary Angler

PS If you have any questions about the services we offer call us at 1-800-667-2311. If you are in the area, feel free to stop by the fly shop and chat for a while. Find out where to go and what is working!

Report #4 (May 11th, 2016)

The Lake Report: While the weather has cooled down, Premier Lake is producing well.

The Lakes in Region 4 have been fishing very well so far this month. There are many lakes in our Region to choose from, but today we decided to head out and fish one of our favorites, Premier Lake.

Cooler weather has recently moved into the area, which is a nice respite from that early season heat we experienced. The snow pack did build up a little recently putting more depth up in the mountains after all that warm weather was melting it away. Today the temperature started out at a chilly 2°C (36°F) in the morning building up to a seasonal 16°C (61°F) later in the day! But what a change from the hot temperatures of a week ago!

Premier is a beautiful lake located a 45 minute drive north of Cranbrook nestled up against the Rocky Mountains. Premier Lake is a consistent producer of nice rainbow trout and poplar with the locals.

We put our craft onto the water mid-lake at the rod and gun club. We immediately set to checking the drop-off ledges for cruising fish. Once we spotted some rainbows in the shallows we anchored the boat in place with the wind to our backs. We set up our chironomid rigs to sink down about 15 feet with a swivel for weight about 18 inches from the end where we tied on a size 14-16 chironomid.

We casted our lines out over the drop-off ledge setting the indicator in the proper position so the chironomid was left hanging just off the bottom. Then we began a slow, short retrieve. When the chironomid hatch is on, the fishing can be fast and furious and you can watch the indicator go down like crazy, it so much fun!

The fishing was quite good today. Each angler caught and released around 15 rainbows. All of these fish were in the 15 to 18 inch range. Two of the rainbows were over 20 inches in length and jumped repeatedly making for an exciting fight. All the fish looked healthy and strong. The fishing at Premier can be very good when it is on, but it is always fun to get out on this Lake.

In addition to seeing strong chironomid hatches on the Lake, we also saw Callibaetis mayflies coming off, while the damselfly nymphs and dragonflies were just starting to come out along the bank edges.

The flies we used on this trip included Green Chironomids, the Chromie, Rick's Prom Midge and Black Chironomids (sizes 14-18). We also used micro leeches, damselfly nymphs, and Callibaetis Mayflies (sizes 12-14).

Just remember if you are out lake fishing and not hitting anything, you can always increase your chances by pulling a leech or Doc Spratley along the bottom. The fish love feeding on these flies as well.

River Update:

The Columbia and Kootenay River are open year round. The Columbia continues to fish very well this spring. The Kootenay is still dirty due to the freshet.

If you are in the area, come into our Fly Shop in Cranbrook to check our excellent assortment of flies and fishing accessories!

Take care,

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us today at 1-800-667-2311 to book your trip on the Columbia River or discuss available days on the St.Mary and Elk rivers this season.

Report #3 (May 2nd, 2016)

Columbia River Report: another great day of chasing rainbows!

This trip out we decided to fish the upper section of the River stretching from the City of Castlegar down towards Genelle. Our goal was to hunt through the big and small back eddies, plus look in on the bank edge runs along the way.

The last couple of days we have seen some rain, which was great for the tributary streams. But on this day the weather again was spectacular. In the morning the temperature started out at a nice 16°C (61°F) and later built to a high of 28°C (82°F). Wow, it was just like a summers day!

The water temperature remains quite cool as the River level is starting to come up. On this day it was running at around 80,000 cubic feet per second and we expect it to reach 90,000 CFS in a week or so as the runoff builds. This stretch of the Columbia is influenced by the operation of upstream dams on both the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers. The increased flows are now pushing a lot of the food into the big back eddies and the fish are starting to move from bank edges to the big swirls.

Before we launched the boat we assembled streamer rods, nymphing rods and one rod set up for dry fly fishing as it is great to be ready for anything that comes our way. One angler even brought along his Spey rod to fish from shore!

The fishing started off with a bang and we caught a few rainbows in the 16-18 inch range. After this initial action we moved on to another of our preferred areas and began casting again. The key to success this time of year is to get your fly into that little wedge of water where the current is forcing and concentrating the food. Once there you must mend and maneuver your fly appropriately to keep it there long enough so the fish can find it.

The biggest fish landed on the day was a nice 22 inch rainbow which took the angler into the backing and jumped like crazy. The rainbows are in very good shape now and have a lot of energy --- they are chunky and fight very hard!

On this particular day there was an epic Black Caddis hatch on the River; it was like a snowstorm. Thank goodness we all had our face buffs on during the hatch or we would have been eating our share. One wonders when a hatch like this is going on, why would a fish even take our artificials as there was so much food in the water...crazy! The fishing did slow down a bit with the hatch, but as the day progressed the fishing picked up again with each angler catching 15 to 20 rainbow trout. Yes, the river is fishing well.

The flies that were working well included: the Prince Nymph, Lightening Bugs, Copper Johns (size 14-16); Kelly's Super Streamers and the Speckled Girdle Bug (size 10-14). We also tossed the Black and Tan Caddis on dries (size 16-18).

During the trip we saw an eagle and an osprey prowling the eddies and cruising high above their nests. We also saw the Canadian Geese working the grass along the shore.

The fishing season on the Columbia River is now in full go mode. We still have some days open so give us a call and come on up and check it out.

Lake Round-up:

The lakes in our region are also fishing very well as we are experiencing some great Chironomid fishing. Basically everything is hatching right now: Dragons, Damsels, May Flies and Chironomids and the fish are gorging themselves!

If you are nearby and have any questions on the rivers, streams and lakes in our region, come on into our Fly Shop in Cranbrook and we will help you out!

Take care,

Kelly
St.Mary Angler

PS Call us today at 1-800-667-2311 to book your trip on the Columbia River!

Report #2 (April 22nd, 2016)

Lazy Lake Report; ice free and ready to go!

We normally see the lakes in our region starting to ice off by the middle of April. However, this year, like 2015, some of the lakes were already ice free by the end of March and all the other lakes were iced off by the first or second week of April.

So Whitetail, Whiteswan, Premier and Lazy lakes are all ready to go now. This crazy warm April weather has seen many of the locals out enjoying the balmy weather; camping and fishing the lakes every weekend. So we thought we would join them in the fun.

With such an early start to 2016 the lakes still remain cold and not all of them have turned over. Where they have not, the oxygen has yet to spread throughout the whole lake so the fish remain deep, feeding on the bottom targeting different types of leeches, scuds and shrimp. That said, we are seeing hatches of chironomids popping off at certain times of the day. So we are finding that the fish are either staying very deep (20-25 feet) feeding on chironomids, or traveling along the drop of ledges a little higher up in the water column where guys have been hooking them at around 10-18 feet of depth.

As we progress through April we have seen the hatches of chironomids and callibaetis may flies become more abundant. Again when these bugs are hatching, the fishing can be very good. On the lakes that have turned over already, the oxygen and nutrients have been spread throughout the water column and the fish are happily feeding at all depths.

Today we went out to fish Lazy Lake. I would describe the fishing as “interesting” as we really had to work hard to figure it out! We anchored on a drop-off ledge with the wind to our backs. Our setup was an 18 foot leader and tippet outfitted with an indicator and a swivel (weight) 18 inches above our chironomid. We casted out over the drop-off ledge, let the rig sink down about a minute and then slowly retrieved the fly back towards the boat. If we did not touch a fish after a couple of casts we would move the boat closer to shore and fish higher up in the water column.

We hit a few trout using this approach, catching and releasing five rainbows each. Then we switched over to a sinking line and fished along the bottom pulling leeches. On the first fish we landed, we decided to use a throat pump to see what it was consuming. As it turns out the trout was keying on very small green chironomids, scuds and shrimp.

We continued to fish while observing a few sporadic hatches. The weather started to move in and with barometric pressure dropping it began to rain. Once it had rained a bit, the fish became more active and we caught some nice ones.

The fish we landed were healthy, but one could see they need to fatten up a bit... again it is very early in the season. The biggest fish on the day was a nice 19 rainbow that put up a good fight, leaving the water a few times. Lazy Lake has some nice big fish in it and they always put up a pretty good fight.

The flies used today included the Chromies, Rick's Prom Midge, Snow Cones, Green Chironomids, Balanced Leeches and Micro Leeches.

The wild life on the water included a group of turtles tanning on the rocks near the bank edge, an eagle flying around looking for it's next meal and ducks cruising the Lake... trying to avoid the eagle perhaps? We also saw some Canadian Geese doing their thing along the shore.

River Roundup:

All our rivers (Region 4 - Kootenay) are closed from April 1 to June 15th. The only exceptions are the Columbia and Kootenay rivers. The Kootenay River is presently pretty muddy because the run-off has started. The Columbia remains clear.

Always remember to check the fishing regulations before you head on the water. Feel free to regularly check us out on Instagram and Facebook for updates, programs and shop specials we put on over the course of the year.

If you are in the area and have any questions on the lakes or streams, feel free to stop by our Fly Shop in Cranbrook to chat with us in person!

Take care,

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS If you are interested in booking an early season trip on the Columbia River or any trip throughout the year, call us directly at 1-800-667-2311.

Report #1 (April 11th, 2016)

Columbia River Report: there are lots of fish out there!

The annual cycle of life has brought us back to the opening of the 2016 fishing season again! Today we were out on the Columbia River chasing the big rainbow trout.

This winter was a good one in terms of the snowpack as it deposited a normal amount of the white stuff in our region. The month of March and April have seen temperatures a couple of degrees Celsius warmer than usual, so the runoff has already commenced. We don't expect any flooding, but should have plenty of water to carry us through the summer. This is good news considering the elevated water temperature problems that were experienced throughout the West last year.

On this trip we started off with a great breakfast at the Prestige Hotel in Rossland, B.C. Then with the remnants of coffees in hand, we loaded the gear into the truck and headed down the big hill into the valley of the Columbia River.

We drove upriver to the put-in at the waterside village of Genelle. After our launch we powered up towards the top section of the Columbia River near the town of Castlegar. This stretch of the Columbia has many great runs and back eddies, so the guys were pretty excited to get their rods out and shake off the winter cobwebs! The weather has been exceptional this spring with numerous beautiful sunny days and warm temperatures reaching a pleasant 20°C (70°F).

Today we had very light winds, which is always a bonus when out on any river. It certainly makes casting streamers and nymph rigs on the Columbia easier. The water temperature is still pretty cold at this time of year and the water levels remain relatively low at around 56,000 cubic feet per second.

Our approach on the day was to fish streamers with a sinking line, as well as using fly rods set up for nymphing. It is always good to have multiple rods at the ready so once out on the water one can try different methods depending on what's working. So we fished along the bank edges and worked the big back eddies.

There is no doubt that the fishing has turned on, as the anglers started hooking up trout right out of the gate. On the day, each angler hooked and landed 15 rainbows each. A lot of them were in the 16-18 inch range with a couple of robust 20 inch rainbows caught and released... and all of them put up an awesome fight! During the day we caught a number of different sized fish which demonstrates the age class diversity and health of this fishery. When you throw your line into the Columbia you never really know what size of fish will be fooled by your fly. All the fish looked healthy and chunky, obviously over wintering well in this big system.

The hatches were few and far between today, but we did see some chironomids and small midges coming off at various times throughout the float. We also saw a lot of bird life on the River. This included ospreys patrolling overhead, hanging around their nests and feeding in the same eddies we were fishing!

As the day progressed, and the typical experimentation was undertaken, we figured out what flies were quite effective. These included; Kelly's Super Streamer, as well as the Sparkled Girdle Bug, Purple Prince Nymph and the Regular Prince Nymph. The fishing on the Columbia has been very productive early this season, so give some thought to coming up and chasing these big rainbow trout with us.

Lake Round-up:

As for the lakes in our region, they are all open and have been fishing great. Whitetail, Whiteswan and Premier Lakes are now all iced off. This is very early for them to be ice free and fishing so well. It seems a little crazy they are fishing this well, this early. Come check them out for yourself.

Just a reminder that all the small streams in our region are now closed (April 1st – June 15th) for the spring run-off and the spawning period. This includes the St.Mary, Elk, Bull, etc. Spring has come early again this year so everything is way ahead of normal.

We hope to see you up here sometime throughout the 2016 fishing season. If you have any questions on the lakes or streams, just stop by our Fly Shop in Cranbrook and we will help you out!

Take care,

Kelly

St.Mary Angler

PS Call us today at 1-800-667-2311 to book your trip on the Columbia River!